



Fact Sheet

SeniorCare is an array of services for Alaska seniors. SeniorCare bridges a gap for low-income seniors until the full Medicare prescription drug coverage begins in January 2006, and provides a statewide senior information, resource and referral service for all Alaska seniors.

Seniors who qualify for the Senior Assistance Program (65 and older and 135 percent of the poverty level), and who are not receiving comprehensive Medicaid prescription drug coverage will be provided a choice – between the new SeniorCare prescription drug subsidy of \$1,600 a year or to continue to receive the Senior Assistance Program cash assistance of \$1,440 a year. Together with the \$600 Medicare subsidy to begin this spring, these eligible seniors opting for the SeniorCare prescription drug benefit will have a combined drug subsidy of \$2,200 a year. Seniors who are receiving Medicaid prescription drug coverage will be able to continue receiving the cash assistance of \$120 per month.

According to new Federal Poverty Level guidelines effective February 2004, a senior qualifies for the Senior Assistance Program if he or she earns less than \$15,701 annually, or if living with a spouse, earns less than \$21,074. To qualify, some assets are considered in the overall needs test.

Also beginning April 1, 2004, seniors between 135 percent and 150 percent of poverty level will qualify for a prescription drug benefit of \$1,000 a year. Seniors who have an annual income less than \$17,445 for an individual, or \$23,415 for a couple, will qualify.

Other services offered through SeniorCare include a new Senior Information Office operated by the Division of Senior and Disabilities Services. This office will be a one-stop resource for information seniors need. The Alaska Senior Information Office provides a statewide toll-free telephone number and Web site for information on services available to seniors, which will include an up-to-date directory of local physicians who accept Medicaid and Medicare clients, available programs and services including SeniorCare, and prescription drug information and assistance.

The Medicaid Preferred Drug List, scheduled to be in place by late spring 2004, will help to contain costs for prescription drugs provided to those receiving Medicaid. The list will contain recommendations, selected by Alaska physicians and pharmacists, on drugs that are proven to be the most effective, moderately priced and safe. The Preferred Drug List will also provide a valuable resource for all seniors to compare prescription drug costs, and will enable seniors to work with their physicians to identify cost-effective drugs that are right for them. Once implemented next spring, seniors can get the list from the new Alaska Senior Information Office. The Senior Information Office and the Preferred Drug List will not need legislative approval to be implemented.

Current programs for seniors which will fall under SeniorCare include comprehensive Medicaid health insurance coverage and Medicare cost-sharing assistance for low-income seniors. About 7,800 eligible seniors will receive prescription drugs, medical care, hospitalization and other services from the state at a cost of \$219 million this year. In addition, DHSS will continue to work with the Denali Commission and others to ensure greater access to healthcare for Medicaid and Medicare patients.

To be eligible for the two levels of SeniorCare benefits, a senior age 65 or older must meet the following eligibility criteria:

First Level: Seniors eligible to receive the \$1,600 Senior Care Prescription Drug Subsidy or \$1,440 Senior Assistance Program cash assistance:

- Beginning April 1, 2004, individuals may have an annual gross income of up to \$15,701, couples a combined annual gross income of up to \$21,074 (below 135 percent of the federal poverty level). Permanent Fund Dividend income is not counted.
- Participants receiving Medicaid prescription drug coverage are only eligible for cash assistance, and are not eligible for the SeniorCare prescription drug benefit.

Second Level: Seniors eligible to receive the \$1,000 Senior Care Prescription Drug Subsidy only:

- Beginning April 1, 2004, individuals may have an annual gross income of up to \$17,445, couples a combined annual gross income of up to \$23,415 (between 135 percent and 150 percent of the federal poverty level). Permanent Fund Dividend income is not counted.

Assets allowed:

- Individuals may have assets up to \$4,000, couples combined assets up to \$6000.
 - Assets not counted include a home, funds set aside for burial, automobiles, real estate and other real property.
 - Only liquid assets are counted such as cash and those assets easily converted to cash (e.g., stocks, bonds, IRAs, etc.).

For individuals, eligibility is based solely on their own income and assets. For married couples that are living together, eligibility is based on their combined income and assets regardless of whether one or both are 65 or older.

Other eligibility criteria:

- The senior must be a US citizen or legal alien, a resident of Alaska, and must intend to remain a resident of Alaska throughout the duration of the program.
- Only those seniors living independently (outside an institution such as a nursing home, Pioneer Home, API) are eligible.

Once they receive the benefit, recipients must report changes in residence, mailing address or the death of a spouse within 10 days.

[more]

The Benefit:

Seniors who qualify for this year's Senior Assistance Program, and who are not receiving Medicaid prescription drug coverage, will be provided a choice. They will choose to receive the new SeniorCare prescription drug subsidy of \$1,600 a year or to continue to receive the Senior Assistance Program cash assistance of \$120 per month (\$1,440 a year). Together with the \$600 Medicare subsidy to begin this spring, these eligible seniors opting for the SeniorCare prescription drug benefit will have a combined benefit of \$2,200 a year.

Additionally, seniors between 135 percent and 150 percent of poverty level will receive a prescription drug benefit of \$1,000 a year.

How to Apply

Seniors who meet the eligibility criteria need apply only once by mail. The application asks for information about income and assets, and requires the applicant to supply proof.

If found eligible, the individual will receive written notice, and begin receiving the benefit following the month of application.

Applications for SeniorCare cash or prescription drug benefits will soon be available at senior centers, offices of the Division of Public Assistance, and at the SeniorCare website www.seniorcare.alaska.gov. Seniors currently receiving cash assistance from the Senior Assistance Program will receive information and application forms in the mail next week.

The toll-free telephone number for the SeniorCare Senior Information Office is 1-800-478-6065 (Anchorage 907-269-3680) and the Web address is: www.seniorcare.alaska.gov.

Alaska Department of Health & Social Services**Division of Senior and Disabilities Services****SeniorCare Senior Information Office**

Statewide: 1-800-478-6065

Anchorage (907) 269-3680

www.seniorcare.alaska.gov